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SUBJECT: (S) ISRAELI MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF: GOI
REASSESSING DATE IRAN TO GO NUCLEAR; PALESTINIANS CONTINUE
TO PLAN ATTACKS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Chief of Israeli Military Intelligence Aharon Ze'evi Farkash told A/S Welch and Ambassador Kurtzer August 16 that he was surprised by U.S. media reports on a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that Iran could build its first nuclear weapon only by 2015. He noted that recent U.S. interlocutors shared his assessment that 2010 is the more likely date. Farkash said that he has assembled a special team to reassess the date and that he will share the findings with the USG.

¶2. (C) Summary cont: On Palestinian issues, Farkash expressed concern that ongoing attempts by terrorists to launch attacks in Gaza and Israel could have "terrible results" on disengagement. He characterized Hamas' participation in the current period of calm around Israel's Gaza just-started withdrawal as an illusion, since Hamas continues to build up its forces in the West Bank, including in Jenin. Farkash highlighted Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas's efforts to increase his power by seeking a closer alliance with PA Prime Minister Ahmed Quraya'. Farkash forecast heightened tensions and rivalry between Hamas and the PA after disengagement and leading up to the planned January 21, 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. End Summary.

¶3. (C) At the start of the meeting, an animated Farkash noted his satisfaction with the behavior of the thousands of IDF troops and Israeli police currently in Gaza making preparations to evacuate the remaining settlers families from the Strip. He expressed hope that after disengagement is completed, Israel will be stronger as a nation. "This is a real test of our DNA as a nation," he said. He noted that it is not important whether disengagement is right or wrong, but that the government's decision is followed and democracy is strengthened.

Assessing When Iran Goes Nuclear

¶4. (S) Farkash said that U.S. press accounts about a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate assessing that Iran could build its first nuclear weapon only by 2015 surprised him. He noted that Sharon had asked him about the U.S. report and its timing. Farkash said that, based on Israeli intelligence, Iran could achieve independent research and development for uranium enrichment within four to six months. Iran could then reach the next threshold -- the "success-oriented" stage -- and produce enough fissile material for a weapon by 2008. He said it would then be necessary to assess whether Iran could cross the next threshold and actually build a nuclear weapon by 2010. Farkash stressed that all of his recent U.S. interlocutors had agreed that Iran could have a nuclear weapon by 2010 -- "no one said 2015." Farkash said that he has now assembled a special team to reassess this date and that he expects the results in about three weeks. He said he would share the findings with the USG.

¶5. (S) The Ambassador asked Farkash why he believes the U.S. and Israeli estimates differ, and whether this could be based on varying assessments of possible technical problems faced by the Iranians. Farkash said that a 2008 completion date for the Iranians would be a dream, but that 2009 or 2010 is possible. He speculated that the USG had perhaps calculated that other factors would disrupt Iran's plans. He noted that it would be more difficult to disrupt Iran's plans now that it has reached the P-2 centrifuge stage.

¶6. (S) A/S Welch noted that the USG has an effective dialogue with the EU-3 on Iran. Farkash questioned whether the EU-3 efforts are enough to prevent Iran from moving forward. The process to deal with Iran's nuclear program is "critical for the region," Farkash underlined, since Egypt, Turkey, Syria and Saudi Arabia are waiting to see how the international community deals with Iran. He added that North Korea would also be influenced by the international reaction.

He added that the South African initiative on Iran was very bad timing, and that it gives the Iranians the impression they can win.

¶ 17. (C) Colonel Amit Doron, of DMI's Palestinian Division, noted that the relative calm now within Gaza is mainly due to an understanding by most Palestinian factions, including Hamas and, to a lesser extent, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, that quiet is needed to facilitate the Israeli withdrawal. He stressed, however, that some Fatah "offshoots" continue to plan attacks in Gaza and suicide attacks in Israel. Doron underlined that "if one attack succeeds, it could change the whole situation." Farkash echoed this view, stressing that he is "really afraid about these (terrorist) efforts." He also maintained that the relative calm now is really an "illusion" since Hamas is building up its forces in the West Bank. According to Farkash, PA President Abbas will use the current calm to justify a return to the roadmap.

¶ 18. (C) Security "anarchy" is also a problem within Gaza, Doron said, noting the recent kidnapping of a French journalist by armed militants in Gaza City. He said he believes that the kidnapping was conducted by the Issa family, which is connected to Hamas and which has family members in PA prisons. Doron said that the PA is not trying to address this problem and that it will therefore continue. In response to a query from A/S Welch, Doron said that the recent kidnapping of UNRWA workers was not carried out by this family, but rather by Fatah.

Eyeing Elections, Abbas Seeks Legitimacy

¶ 19. (C) Farkash discussed President Abbas' efforts to solidify his power base after disengagement and in the run-up to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections now scheduled for January 21. Farkash stressed that Abbas was actively trying to enlist PA PM Quraya's support since Abbas understands that Quraya' has street power. Farkash predicted that in the next two-to-three months, Abbas will increase efforts to pull Quraya' closer. Farkash emphasized that to strengthen his position, Abbas wants to demonstrate positive post-disengagement results related to the following issues:

- crossings and access, including airport and seaport "to show Gaza is not a jail;"
- Palestinian view of the 1949 border, which, Farkash noted, is different by about 200 meters from where portions of the current 60-kilometer fence around Gaza are located. Farkash claimed that the PA does not have any maps to prove their position; (Note: The Ambassador requested that Farkash brief him on this border issue, to which Farkash responded that he would seek MOD approval.)
- access to 12 miles of territorial waters, rather than three miles;
- GOI release of more Gaza prisoners;
- strengthening of the link between Gaza and the West Bank; and
- Israel's departure from the Philadelphia Corridor.

¶ 110. (C) Farkash noted that Egypt's role in Gaza is important to Abbas. "Egypt is crucial," Farkash underlined, "and their behavior (in the disengagement process) has been positive," he noted. Farkash added that Egypt "hates" Gaza and it is a problem for them. Egypt has played a positive role on disengagement thus far, Farkash said, because it views Gaza as a problem, and one that could affect Egyptian Rafah if it is not resolved.

¶ 111. (C) Farkash claimed that the Rafah Crossing issue had been decided at Camp David and that if Sharon decides to "give up" the Philadelphia Corridor, it would be a question of forfeiting Israeli land. (Note: We have not identified any reference to the Rafah Crossing in the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty of 1979, including its military protocol. End Note.)

PA-Hamas Rivalry to Heat up After Disengagement

¶ 112. (C) Doron stressed that the PA and Hamas have different post-disengagement agendas and that at some point, the two could clash. He said that for the time being, however, the PA and Hamas understand the need to maintain calm to secure Israel's withdrawal. The PA has been actively trying to contain Hamas, Doron said, and has tried to co-opt the movement by meeting Hamas' demands on coordinating Gaza disengagement. Doron said that the PA created a Gaza disengagement coordinating committee with Hamas. He said that while it appears that the PA has conceded to Hamas demands on the committee, in reality, the results have

benefited the PA.

¶13. (C) In response to query from A/S Welch, Doron said that Egypt has been playing a positive role in resolving problems between the PA and Hamas. Doron emphasized, however, that Egypt wants to achieve "quiet at any price" between Hamas and the PA and that sometimes it sides with Hamas. Farkash underlined that Egypt's philosophy in this regard is dangerous, as it could weaken the PA.

¶14. (C) Doron and Farkash stressed that President Abbas is aware that he must seek greater legitimacy with the public and is actively trying to "gain control of the streets." In this respect, Doron added, Abbas is trying to convince the public not to disrupt settlements after evacuation and not to fire rockets. Doron noted that Abbas is working to coordinate aspects of disengagement with Israel to achieve positive results that he can show the public. Doron said that Hamas is also vying to become the main political power after disengagement and is trying to depict itself as a "responsible force." Doron pointed to the street competition between the PA and Hamas, with both sides organizing demonstrations and marches. Hamas leaders also warned Abbas repeatedly not to ask Hamas to give up its weapons and said that whoever asks Hamas to do so, will be labeled as a criminal by the movement, Doron noted.

¶15. (C) In response to A/S Welch's question as to how long the period of relative calm will last after disengagement, Farkash said that he expects that the calm will last until the PLC elections. The elections, Farkash stressed, will be a "critical junction" for Abbas. He said that if Hamas gets 20-25 percent of the vote, Abbas will have succeeded in gaining support from the street, but if Hamas obtains 30-35 percent of the vote, it will bode very poorly for Abbas. Farkash said that Abbas is making a "huge effort" to win over the public and to convince them to oppose continuing the Intifada. Hamas believes in the Intifada, Farkash said, and it will argue for continuing the Intifada to achieve Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

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